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ABSTRACT

Examined were the development and correlates of children's strategies for resisting maternal control. Subjects were 51 dyads consisting of depressed or nondepressed mothers and their young. Children were 1.5 to 3.5 years of age at first observation and 5 years old during the second. Data on parent and child behaviors were coded from 9 hours of videotapes of spontaneous interactions. Active and passive forms of noncompliance were distinguished; active noncompliance behaviors were also coded in terms of their quality as interpersonal influence strategies. Findings indicated that developmental changes in children's responses to control were consistent with a perspective on noncompliance that emphasizes children's growth as autonomous agents and developing social skills. Aversive strategies such as passive noncompliance and direct defiance decreased with age while relatively more sophisticated forms of resistance, simple refusal and negotiation, increased with age. Both compliance and quality of noncompliance were predictable over time. Children 5 years of age who used skillful forms of noncompliance tended to use skillful strategies when making requests. At both ages only unskillful forms of noncompliance were related to maternal perceptions of children's maladjustment. During toddlerhood only unskillful forms of noncompliance were associated with observed negative affect in the mother. Overall, boys used more defiance and refusals than girls. Girls were more compliant than boys in families with well mothers. (Author/RH)

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DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN'S NONCOMPLIANCE STRATEGIES FROM TODDLERHOOD TO AGE 5.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the development and correlates of children's strategies for resisting maternal control. The subjects were 51 dyads consisting of depressed and nondepressed mothers and their young children who were 1 1/2 to 3 1/2 years old at the time of the first observations and 5 years old during the second time of observation. Data on parent and child behaviors were coded from videotapes of spontaneous interactions in a naturalistic apartment setting. Active and passive forms of noncompliance were distinguished; active noncompliant behaviors were also coded in terms of their quality as interpersonal influence strategies.

Developmental changes in children's responses to control were consistent with a perspective on noncompliance emphasizing children's growth as autonomous agents and developing social skills. Aversive strategies such as passive noncompliance and direct defiance decreased with age while relatively more sophisticated forms of resistance, simple refusal and negotiation, increased with age. Both compliance and quality of noncompliance showed evidence of predictability over time.

Five-year-olds who used skillful forms of noncompliance tended to use skillful strategies when asking their mothers to do something for them. At both ages only unskillful forms of noncompliance were related to maternal perceptions of children's maladjustment (CBCL). During toddlerhood only unskillful forms of noncompliance were associated with observed negative affect in the mother.

Overall, boys used more defiance and refusals than girls. Girls were more compliant than boys in families with well, but not depressed, mothers.

DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN'S NONCOMPLIANCE STRATEGIES FROM TODDLERHOOD TO AGE 5.

INTRODUCTION

Rates of noncompliance with parental requests or prohibitions as high as 40 to 50% have been reported for children in well functioning families. However, the function of noncompliance in normal development is not well understood. A longstanding perspective is that some level of opposition, is sign of children's developing autonomy and assertiveness (Wenar, 1982). Recently, Kuczynski, Kochanska, Girnius-Brown & Radke-Yarrow, (1987) proposed a "social skill perspective" on noncompliance. Noncompliant behaviors could be viewed as social strategies used by children to influence parents to drop or modify their requests. (Table 1). Noncompliant behaviors vary in their sophistication and effectiveness as social influence strategies and become less direct and aversive with age. A developmental function of noncompliance could be to provide a context for children to develop their own skills for interpersonal influence and appropriate expression of autonomy.

In this study, children's responses to parental directives were observed longitudinally from the toddler period to age 5. One purpose was to determine whether developmental changes in noncompliance indicative of increasing expression of autonomy and social skill reported in earlier cross-sectional studies of toddler age children continue into early childhood. Second, we explored whether children's responses to parental control show evidence of coherence or stability within individuals over time. Third, a prediction emerging from the "noncompliance as social skill" hypothesis is that the quality of children's resistance to parental control should be related to their level of skill in other areas of social interaction. We

therefore, examined whether there was an association between the quality of children's noncompliance to maternal control and the quality of their influence strategies when children issued a directive or prohibition to their mothers. Finally, we explored whether mothers distinguish between skillful (negotiation, simple refusals) and unskillful (direct defiance, whining, passive noncompliance) noncompliance. One prediction was that only unskillful noncompliance would be perceived as being stressful by mothers (as measured by negative affect observed during mother-child interactions). A second prediction was that only unskillful forms of noncompliance would contribute to mothers' perceptions of behavior problems (CBCL, Achenbach & Edelbrock) in their children.

Method

The data were sampled from videotapes of 9 hours of spontaneous interactions between 51 mothers and their children in a homelike apartment setting (Table 2). Data for toddler responses to maternal control were coded in terms of: compliance, passive noncompliance, simple refusal, direct defiance and negotiation. For 5-year olds "negotiation" was divided into 2 categories : bargaining and explaining; in addition, the presence or absence of a whiny tone of voice was coded separately (Table 3). The 5-year olds' strategies for influencing mothers included: direct commands, indirect commands, explanation, bargaining and coercion.

Results and Conclusions

Group differences on children's strategies were analysed using MANOVAS and related ANOVAS. Overall, boys were less compliant and used more defiance and refusals than girls. Passive noncompliance decreased with age suggesting that children's development as autonomous agents as indexed by their overt resistance to control continues beyond toddlerhood. Consistent with the social skill hypothesis, direct defiance, the most obtrusive way of saying "no" decreased in frequency with age. In contrast, simple refusals and particularly, negotiation, increased with age of child (Figure 1).

Spearman correlations yielded evidence of coherence in the quality of children's responses to control from toddlerhood to age 5. Compliance during toddlerhood was significantly related to both compliance and the use of explanation at age 5 (Table 4). Toddler negotiation was positively related to later use of bargaining. Toddlers' use of direct defiance was negatively related to explanation but positively related to whining at age 5.

As predicted, there was evidence that 5 year olds' level of skill when resisting parental control is related to their skill in using control strategies when attempting to influence parental behavior. Children who used whining and defiance when noncomplying used fewer indirect commands and more coercion when issuing directives to parents. Bargaining in the context of noncompliance was related to the use of explanation and bargining as persuasive strategies. (Table 5)

Finally, there is evidence that mothers discriminate between skillful and unskillful forms of noncompliance. Correlations between toddler age children's responses to maternal control and minute by minute ratings of

mother's negative affect (Table 6) observed during 6 hours of interactions with their children indicated that only unskillful forms of noncompliance, passive noncompliance and direct defiance, were positively related to mothers' negative affect. The relatively more skillful strategies of refusal and negotiation were not related to mothers negative affect. Compliance was negatively related to mothers' negative affect).

Mothers' perceptions of their children was also influenced by the quality of their children's opposition (Table 7). The Child Behavior Checklist data suggest that whether children are perceived as having behavior problems depends as much on the quality of children's noncompliance as on its quantity. At both ages only the least skillful forms of resistance were predictive of children's behavior problems at age 5. Indeed, the toddler data suggested that children who assert their autonomy appropriately by means of simple refusals are less likely to be perceived as having behavior problems at age 5. There is also evidence, at least for 5-year-old boys, that frequent compliance is sometimes associated with perceptions of maladjustment.

These findings indicate that it is necessary to distinguish between various forms of noncompliance: they have different developmental trends, they elicit different reactions from parents and have different association with measures of children's competece. Although more research is necessary, a larger implication of this developmental perspective is that noncompliance represents more than simply parental failure to manage children's behavior; a certain level of noncompliance is normative and even desirable in well-functioning families. Noncompliance can serve positive functions in social development: first, by providing a context for children to assert their autonomy in an acceptable manner within the parent-child relationship and

second, by providing a context for children to develop competence in the skills of social interaction.

References

Kuczynski, L., Kochanska, G., Radke-Yarrow, M. & Girnius-Brown, O. (1987). A developmental interpretation of young children's noncompliance. Developmental Psychology, 23, 799-806.

Table 1

SOCIAL SKILL ANALYSIS OF NONCOMPLIANCE CATEGORIES*

(*noncompliance as child's strategy for influencing parent)

Passive noncompliance	-	aversive, unassertive
Direct defiance	-	aversive, direct
Simple refusal	-	nonaversive, direct
Negotiation	-	nonaversive, indirect

Table 2

DESIGN OF STUDY

DIAGNOSTIC GROUPS (SADS-L, R.D.C. Criteria)

TIME 1: Normal n = 33
Unipolar Depression n = 37

Diagnostic groups collapsed for this study.

TIME 2: Normal n = 25
Unipolar Depression n = 26

AGE OF CHILD

TIME 1: 16 to 51 months ("Toddlers")

TIME 2: 5 years

OBSERVATIONAL DATA

Coded from videotapes of spontaneous mother-child interactions obtained in the context of a naturalistic apartment suite setting.

Table 3

NONCOMPLIANCE CATEGORIES

Passive noncompliance - child ignores mother; noncompliance without overt opposition or negative affect.

Direct defiance - noncompliance with overt anger, defiance, or negative affect

Simple refusal - verbal refusal with no negative affect
e.g. "no","no thank you", "I don't want to", "uh...uh"

Negotiation: Bargain - offers bargains, compromises, alternaltives; asks for explanations
e.g. "why?", "I have a better idea..." "I'll do it if...", "I'll do it later." "Lets make a deal."

Negotiation: Excuses - offers explanation for not complying.
e.g. "but I'm already clean", "but I'm tired", "but I'm still on the horsey", "I want to eat that last"

Whining: - presence of whiny tone of voice (submissive, aversive quality) coded independently of other categories.

Note: Bargaining, excuses and whining coded separately only at age 5

Figure 1

DEVELOPMENTAL CHANGE IN NONCOMPLIANCE STRATEGIES FROM TODDLER PERIOD TO AGE 5. (LONGITUDINAL DATA)

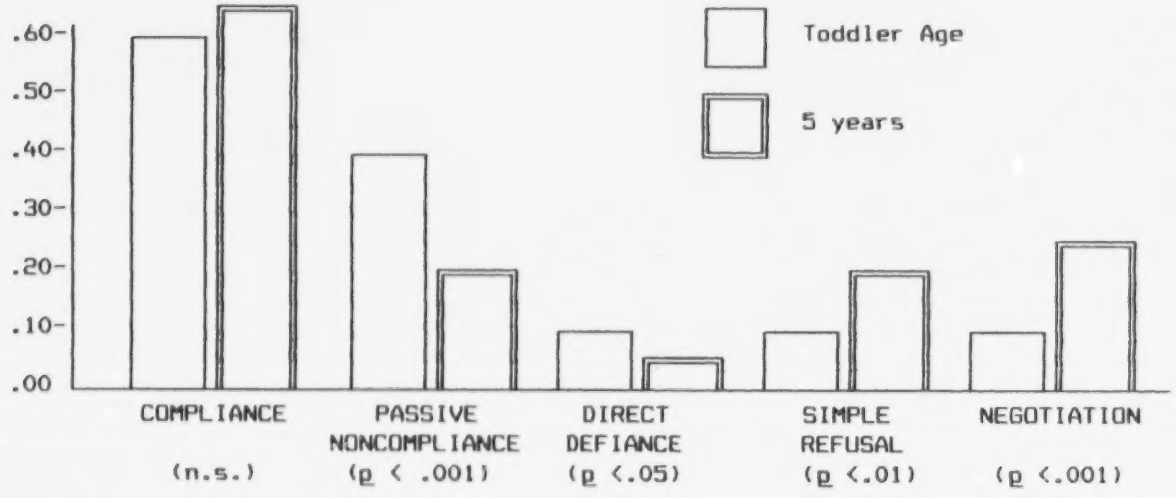

Table 4

Stability & Coherence of Child Responses Over Time: Correlations Beween Two Age Periods.

	5 Year Olds						
Toddler Age	Compliance	Passive Noncomp.	Direct Defiance	Whining	Simple Refusal	Negotiation Excuses	Bargain
Compliance	.43**	-.38**		-.22[1]		.42**	
Passive Noncomp.	-.29*	.35*				-.25*	
Direct Defiance	-.21[1]	.30*		.34**		-.44**	
Simple Refusal	-.29*						
Negotiation[1]						-.24*	24*

[1] $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$;

Table 5

Correlations between Child Responses to Maternal Control and Child Strategies For Controlling Mothers' Behavior (Age 5).

	Child's Control Strategies					
Child's Responses to Control	Direct Commands	Unclear Commands	Reprimand	Suggest	Bargain	Explain
Compliance		-.24*				
Passive Noncompliance					-.23*	
Direct Defiance		.19[1]	.32**	-.19[1]		
Whining		.32**	.20[1]	-.36**		
Simple Refusal	.22[1]			.19[1]	.22[1]	
Negotiation: Excuses					.20[1]	
Negotiation: Bargains				19[1]	.22[1]	.30*

[1] $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$;

Table 6

Correlations Between Child Responses and Mother's Negative Affect Observed During Interaction with Child. (Toddler Period)

Child Responses	Mothers' Negative Affect (Observations)
Compliance	-.42**
Passive noncompliance	.33**
Direct defiance	.30**
Simple refusal	-.04
Negotiation	.02

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 7
Correlations Between Children's Responses to Control During Toddlerhood and Age 5 and Behavior Problems[2] at Age 5.

	Behavior Problems at Age 5			
	Toddler Correlations		Age 5 Correlations	
Child Responses to Control	Internalizing	Externalizing	Internalizing	Externalizing
Compliance		(-.45** boys)	(.55** boys)	
Passive Noncompliance				.26*
Direct Defiance		.25*		.33**
Simple Refusal	-.31**	-.24*		
Negotiation				
Excuses				
Bargains				
Whining				

[1] $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$;

[2] CBCL Achenbach & Edelbrock (1981)